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ABSTRACT

A study investigated common discourse features in the Spanish of six novice-level Spanish second language learners, as evidenced in oral interviews by two interviewers. Features examined included use of cohesive devices, use of the first language, whispering to self, scaffolding with the interviewer to express themselves, and negotiation. Results in each of these areas are discussed, illustrated with excerpts from the interviews. Results indicate that novice-level learners do attempt to produce cohesive discourse and use cohesive devices increasingly as proficiency increases; learners did not readily transfer first-language rules regarding pronoun usage, but exploited the Spanish pro-drop feature to promote cohesive discourse; as proficiency increases, learners attempt to use more conjunctions and similar devices; and scaffolding and negotiation were important features of novice-level discourse. Revisions to the ACTFL Novice Oral Proficiency Guidelines are recommended, based on these findings. Contains 17 references. (MSE)

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Discourse Features of Spanish Oral Production at the Novice Level

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REBECCA JO BEARDEN, The University of Texas at Austin

Despite the recent emphasis in second language acquisition research on communicative ability, little analysis or description of Novice-Level speech has been produced. This paper examines this topic and has two primary purposes: first, to describe some of the distinguishing discourse features of Spanish oral production at the Novice Level, and second, to discuss the methodological implications of these findings. The data consist of six Oral Proficiency Interviews all rated at the Novice Level by two separate interviewer/raters trained by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The data were analyzed for the presence of common discourse features, including cohesive devices, use of the first language, negotiation, and scaffolding. Methodological implications of the findings are discussed, and finally a revision of the Novice-Level ACTFL proficiency guidelines that incorporates the findings of the current study is suggested. It is hoped that this investigation will help establish a more complete understanding of oral production at the lower levels of proficiency and thereby encourage the development of teaching and testing procedures designed to fit the needs and skills of the students in our foreign language classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Oral proficiency has recently become the subject of much research on second language acquisition. Development of oral proficiency testing, begun in the early 1950s by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), was subsequently applied to the academic setting with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). The result was a surge of interest in this innovative method that has brought about a profound change in the goals and attitudes towards the teaching of foreign languages. The current trend is to teach students to create with the language and to use the language to fulfill a variety of functions. This trend is a dramatic departure from the traditional methods of foreign language instruction, which were described in an editorial published in a major newspaper as "rote drill in quirky idioms and irregular verbs" plus "'cultural appreciation'—the sampling of tacos, quiche or sauerbraten" (cited in Heilenman and Kaplan, 1985, p. 71).

The reality, however, is that even with this newfound emphasis on communicative ability, the vast majority of students enrolled in college level foreign language classes will probably never progress beyond the ACTFL Novice-Level rating. Despite this fact, the majority of research and study involving oral proficiency is concerned with the more advanced levels; very little analysis or description of Novice-Level speech has been produced. Furthermore, studies investigating the discourse features of Novice-Level speech are

virtually nonexistent. Much research in recent years has shown the critical role that discourse plays in the acquisition of a second language. It is, therefore, the intention of this study to examine some discourse features of Spanish OPIs rated at the Novice Level. The study has two purposes: first, to describe some of the distinguishing discourse features of oral production at the Novice Level, and second, to discuss the methodological implications of these findings. It is hoped that the investigation of these two topics will help advance our understanding of oral production at the lower levels of proficiency and thereby encourage the development of teaching and testing procedures designed to fit the needs and skills of the majority of the students in our foreign language classrooms.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The movement towards proficiency-based teaching and testing techniques can be considered to have originated in the early 1950s as a result of an initiative by the FSI to develop meaningful verbal descriptions of various skill levels in order to find a more accurate measure of the ability of foreign service officers to function in their overseas assignments. The FSI scale that was developed identified five proficiency levels, ranging from *Level 1, Elementary Proficiency*: Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements, to *Level 5, Native or Bilingual Proficiency*: Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. In an effort to make these descriptions more applicable and useful in an academic setting, ACTFL subsequently revised the FSI scale to include more and finer-tuned levels at the lower end. Recognizing that most students of foreign language never reach proficiencies above a Level 3 on the FSI scale, the ACTFL scale acknowledged that more levels were needed to characterize and evaluate the oral proficiency of high school and college-level foreign language students. For this reason, the ACTFL scale does not include categories above the Level 3 on the FSI scale.

The implementation of proficiency-based learning has been gaining popularity in academic settings ever since the development of the ACTFL scale. Heilenman and Kaplan (1985) explain that, in the more traditional approaches, "the assumption seems to have been that learning a foreign language equals learning that language's structure, along with a generous amount of vocabulary, all carefully sequenced and spooned out in judicious doses. Enough of these doses, successfully swallowed, presumably result in functional language knowledge. It sounds nice. It sounds logical. It sounds as if it should work. But it doesn't" (p. 58). They contend that proficiency-based curriculum design and testing is an idea whose time has come. As they explain, "Proficiency is seen as a superordinate goal that represents more than the sum total of all discrete items learned and that attempts to balance accuracy with fluency and learning about a language with providing the

opportunity to learn a language by using it" (p. 59).

Despite the growing enthusiasm for proficiency-oriented testing and instruction in academic settings, there is a paucity of studies investigating the lowest proficiency levels. This lack of research is even more striking in light of Heilenman and Kaplan's statement that 80% of foreign language students currently enrolled in college-level foreign language courses will not likely progress beyond the Novice Level (p. 70). The most detailed information to be found about Novice-Level oral production is the generic descriptions of the 1986 ACTFL proficiency guidelines themselves, which are reproduced below.

Novice	**Novice level is characterized by an ability to communicate minimally with learned material.**
Novice-Low	Oral production consists of isolated words and perhaps a few high-frequency phrases. Essentially no functional communicative ability.
Novice-Mid	Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and learned phrases within very predictable areas of need, although quantity is increased. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and show frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words. Speaker may have some difficulty producing even the simplest utterances. Some Novice-Mid speakers will be understood only with great difficulty.
Novice-High	Able to satisfy partially the requirements of basic communicative exchanges by relying heavily on learned utterances but occasionally expanding these through simple recombinations of their elements. Can ask questions or make statements involving learned material. Shows signs of spontaneity, although this falls short of real autonomy of expression. Speech continues to consist of learned utterances rather than of personalized, situationally adapted ones. Vocabulary centers on areas such as basic objects, places, and most common kinship terms. Pronunciation may still be strongly influenced by first language. Errors are frequent and, in spite of repetition, some Novice-High speakers will have difficulty being understood even by sympathetic interlocutors.

Other researchers have made very limited observations as to the nature of Novice-Level speech. These observations, like the ACTFL descriptions themselves, usually characterize oral production in terms of the components of Higgs and Clifford's (1982) Functional Trisection. This measurement identifies three components of language use that constitute the global rating at each proficiency level: *function*, which refers to the linguistic tasks the learner is able to complete successfully; *content*, which describes the setting in which those tasks are performed; and *accuracy*, which refers to the grammar, pronunciation, and syntax of the text.

With regard to function, Heilenman and Kaplan (1985) state that "learners [at the Novice Level] are more accurately characterized by what they are incapable of doing than by what they succeed in doing" (p. 58). Bragger (1985) concurs that "Novice-Level speakers have practically no functional ability, although they can communicate very simply with memorized material" (p. 97). Furthermore, the OPI training manual (Buck, 1989) explains that

> Novice Level speakers have acquired some of the building blocks necessary for creating their own utterances, but they cannot access and manipulate individual elements of learned material and thus can't adapt them to express unique, personalized, or situation-specific messages. Thus the Novice Level speaker is essentially limited to reacting to the conversational partner in highly predictable common daily settings and is only marginally able to initiate communication. (pp. 2-7)

Finally Valdman and Phillips (1977) describe the effect of the Novice-Level speaker's limited functional ability on the development of the interlanguage, stating,

> In initial stages of second language learning, the target language serves only a narrowly communicative function; as a consequence, it is acquired in a highly deviant form that exhibits all the characteristic features of pidginization: emphasis on content words, invariable word order, elimination of functors, etc. As the target language's range of function increases, the learner's interlanguage progressively expands and complexifies. (p. 22)

With regard to content, Omaggio (1986) identifies ten subject areas that Novice speakers generally control sufficiently to be able to list vocabulary associated with the subjects or ask and answer simple questions. These include names of basic objects, family members, colors, articles of clothing, weather expressions, days of the week, months, dates, and time. She states that these ten topics are known as the "ten desperate questions" because they "will often elicit some sample of speech when all other attempts at conversation fail" (p. 16). Omaggio explains that speakers at the Novice Level cannot create or paraphrase with the language, nor are they adept at handling conversation topics that they have not rehearsed before. She further states that they are not able to handle

a survival topic such as checking into a hotel or ordering a meal in a restaurant. She points out that control of these skills is the requirement for an Intermediate-Level rating.

Finally, with regard to accuracy, Bragger states that, "at the Novice Level, accuracy is defined primarily as *intelligibility* because few if any grammar structures exist in the speech to warrant discussion of the precision of the message conveyed" (pp. 97-98).

Omaggio (1986) explains that according to the Relative Contribution Model proposed by the Interagency Language Roundtable, different aspects of language use will play varying roles of importance in the global rating of oral interviews, depending on the proficiency level. Thus, at the Novice Level, vocabulary is the most important element in the speaker's attempts to communicate, while pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and sociolinguistic appropriateness are considered to a lesser degree in the global rating at this level.

Omaggio sums up the nature of Novice-Level speech by stating, "Essentially, the Novice-Level interview is like an oral achievement test, since the learner can produce little more than what he or she has learned in the course of his exposure to the target language" (p. 340).

DATA COLLECTION

The current study analyzed six OPIs conducted by an ACTFL-certified interviewer. The data consisted of two interviews rated at the Novice-Low (NL) level, two rated at Novice-Mid (NM), and two at Novice-High (NH). Each interview was evaluated by two raters, and agreement on the rating was reached in each case. The oral interviews ranged from 5 to 15 minutes and were taped and later transcribed by the researcher.

The NL-level interviews were the shortest. Both began with a series of personal questions such as "Where are you from?", "Where do you live now?", "Do you like it here?", and "What classes are you taking?" The second task in the NL-level interviews required the learners to name various objects indicated by the interviewer. At the NM-level the first task was the same, but the initial personal questions were often followed by additional questions requiring the learners to elaborate on their answers. In one of the NM interviews the second task was also a rather extended naming of objects, but in the other NM interview the second task required the learner to pose questions to the interviewer. The NH-level interviews again began with personal questions that were usually followed by additional questions requiring the learners to elaborate on their responses. The second task at this level was a role play situation, and the third task required the learners to pose questions to the interviewer.

The data were analyzed for common discourse features that could be used to characterize Novice-Level speech. The features that were considered were the use of cohesive devices, switching into the first language (L1), the use of scaffolding, and interactional devices used in negotiation. Finally, some methodological implications of these findings were derived.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Cohesive Devices

Looking at the data, we find some interesting discourse patterns emerging already at the Novice Level. The utilization of cohesive devices serves as a good initial example. As Pavlou (1994) explains, "When we are dealing with the cohesion of a text we are investigating the linguistic means which enable a text to function as a single meaningful unit" (p. 4). He goes on to identify three major categories of cohesive devices: referential, conjunctional, and lexical. We find examples of all three types of cohesive device in the data. By "referential cohesive device," Pavlou refers to the use of pronouns. Observe Robin, for instance, as she talks about her roommate in Example 1. [Note: utterances by the learner are in the right column, while those by the interviewer are in the left.]

Example 1. Robin (NH): Referential Cohesion

1		Oh uh Nancy es muy *amidable. 'Nancy is very friendly'
2		*Amidable? 'Friendly?'
3	Um hum	
4		¿Sí? 'Yes?'
5	¿Y y cómo es físicamente cómo es? 'And what is she like physically, what is she like?'	
6		Oh um pequeña. Uh ella tiene um . . . blonde hair.
7		Uh ella es linda. 'Oh um small. Uh she has um . . . blonde hair.Uh she is pretty.'

In Line 1 Robin uses her roommate's name to establish the reference, but in Lines 6 and 7 she chooses the pronoun *ella* 'she.' This usage gives the discourse cohesion in that the interlocutor infers topic continuity from the discourse.

The occurrence of referential cohesion in the data is shown in Table 1. The data suggest that the use of referential cohesive devices greatly increases as proficiency increases. At the NL level the two learners used no pronouns at all, and at the NM level the two learners used a total of three pronouns. At the NH level we find a dramatic increase in the use of pronouns; the two learners use a total of 31 pronouns. The data, therefore, demonstrate that pronouns are used for greater cohesion in the discourse at the higher levels.

An interesting parallel finding concerns the use of the pro-drop feature across the three proficiency levels. It seems that, since Spanish is a pro-drop language, we must consider the absence of subject pronouns as another referential cohesive device. With the pro-drop feature, as with the use of pronouns, the interlocutor must make refer-

Table 1
Use of Pronouns and Pro-Drop by Learner and Level

Learner & Level	# of Pronouns	Instances of Pro-drop
Leslie - NL	0	1
Chin - NL	0	1
Frank - NM	1	5
Marissa - NM	2	6
Vince - NH	18	4
Robin - NH	13	3

ence to a previous utterance in order to understand fully the relationships between themes in the current message. Consider Example 2, in which Marissa talks about her brother:

Example 2. Marissa (NM): Use of Pro-drop

1	Ah Nueva York. ¿Y qué hace	
2	ahora Eric? ¿Está trabajando?	
	'Ah New York. And what does Eric do now? Is he working?'	
3		Sí um vive en Bangor, Maine uh
4		trabajando uh youth pastor.
		'Yes um he lives in Bangor, Maine uh working uh youth pastor'
5	Oh ah hah. Y . . . y tu hermano	
6	Andy, ¿cómo es? 'And . . . and your brother Andy, what is he like?'	
7		Es um . . . um *mediocre
		'He is um . . . um (invents word)'
8	Ah ha	
9		En height. Uh pelo es . . . (oh) brown
		'In height. Uh hair is . . . '
10	Uh huh.	
11		Uh es veinte y uno años.
		'Uh he is twenty-one years.'
12	Um hum.	
13		Um es um . . . uh (indo) uh going um a
14		la universidad en Bangor Maine
		'Um he is um . . . uh (ing) uh going um to the university in Bangor Maine'
15	Uh huh.	
16		Uh vive con Eric. 'Uh he lives with Eric'

We see consistently throughout this example that Marissa provides no overt subject for her statements.

Table 1 shows that at the NL level each learner used the pro-drop feature once, while at the NH level the two learners used pro-drop a total of seven times. Thus, we also find greater use of this cohesive device at the higher levels of proficiency. A somewhat contradictory finding, however, is that the NM level is characterized by the greatest use of pro-drop. We find that the two learners used this feature a total of 11 times. The other NM learner demonstrates a similar grasp of the pro-drop aspect of Spanish. It is interesting to note that, in this regard, the learners do not show evidence of transfer of their L1 rules that require pronouns, but appear to have adopted quite early the second language (L2) norm and are able to exploit verbal morphology to a greater or lesser degree to maintain cohesive discourse across successive turns.

The question arises, then, why we see a reversal of this tendency at the NH level, where the learners begin supplying overwhelmingly more pronouns and use the pro-drop feature less frequently. There seem to be several plausible answers to this question. First, the NH level is the stage at which the learners start developing their syntactic systems and are producing longer strings of words. It could be that they are still uncomfortable with their command of word-order rules and their ability to exploit verbal morphology accurately; thus, they supply more pronouns in an attempt to ensure their meaning is understood. A second possible explanation is that, at the NL and NM levels, we see much more imitation of the interviewer's speech, which does not generally include pronouns. Perhaps at the NH level, as the learners start to rely less on memorized material and to construct their own sentences, they fall back on their L1 rules and include pronouns in their utterances. The result is that the discourse at this level often seems more redundant and less native-like than the discourse at the NM level with regard to the referential aspect of cohesion.

Pavlou identifies the use of conjunctions as another feature of cohesive discourse. In Table 2 we see a gradual increase in the frequency of conjunctions as proficiency increases. Table 2 shows that the learners at the NL level use no conjunctions. This finding is not surprising given that their utterances are rarely longer than a single word. The only conjunction used at the NM level is *y* 'and.' Again, however, the learners at this level do not produce utterances longer than a single clause and therefore their speech rarely requires the use of conjunctions. At the NH level, on the other hand, we see a much wider variety of conjunctions, and they are used more frequently. Vince in particular uses conjunctions productively and, in addition to *y* 'and,' his repertoire includes *o* 'or,' *pero* 'but,' and *porque* 'because.' He produces utterances of much more complexity than we see at the NL and NM levels, and he achieves a considerable degree of cohesion by the inclusion of these conjunctions, as evidenced in Example 3, where he explained why he studies Spanish.

Table 2
Use of Conjunctions

Learner & Level	No. of Conjunctions
Leslie - NL	0
Chin - NL	0
Frank - NM	2
Marissa - NM	3
Vince - NH	16
Robin - NH	3

Example 3. Vince (NH): Use of Conjunctions

1		Oh, es necesario tener dos años de español.
		'It is necessary to have two years of Spanish.'
2	¿Ah sí? 'Oh yes?'	
3		Sí, sí. Muy importante porque uh en
4		Jacksonville uh ellos no hablan español uh
5		muchas pero uh um va a sur de Jacksonville,
6		uh en Orlando, Miami habla español muy
7		bie . . . uh muchas.
		'Yes, yes. Very important because uh in Jacksonville uh they don't speak Spanish uh many but uh um go to south of Jacksonville, uh in Orlando, Miami speak Spanish very we . . . uh many.'

Robin (NH) used only two conjunctions during her interview, *y* and *pero*, and she was not able to create the same degree of cohesion in her discourse as Vince demonstrated in Example 3.

The third feature of cohesive discourse identified by Pavlou is lexical devices. The only examples of these in the current data are provided by Vince (NH) when he employs the word *también* 'also' on several occasions to link successive utterances. Again, although he displays a lack of variation in his use of cohesive devices, the learner's use of these lexical elements gives his discourse a fluidity that is not seen in the less proficient samples.

2. Use of L1

At all three proficiency levels in the data, the learners often revert back to the use of the L1 while attempting to converse in the L2. In these instances, the use of the L1 appears to serve a variety of purposes. The learners often use the L1 to supply a

vocabulary word that is unknown in the L2. Sometimes the learners solicit a translation of the L1 word, while in other cases they use a word in the L1 to fulfill a communicative need. Example 4 contrasts these two uses of words in the L1.

Example 4. Vince (NH): Contrasting Uses of L1

1	¿Es, cómo, es similar a Middlebury	
2	o es diferente?	
	'Is it, how, is it similar to Middlebury or is it different?'	
3		Uh es no muy diferente, sí uh. . . .
		'Uh it is not very different, yes uh . . . .'
4	¿Cómo, qué diferencias hay?	
	'How? What differences are there?'	
5		Um es un um universidad de um
6		community colegio uh que no es un
7		um . . . es un uh . . . como se dice upper
8		level uh . . . .
		'Um it is a um community college university um that is not a um . . . it is a uh . . . how do you say "upper level" uh . . . .'
9	Sí, es de dos años.	
	'Yes, it is for two years.'	
10		Uh, sí sí sí. Dos años.
		'Uh, yes,yes,yes. Two years.'

In Line 6, Vince uses the word *community* without a rise in intonation or explicitly asking for a translation, and he continues speaking without hesitation. In Lines 7 and 8, however, he requests a translation of the L1 word.

Throughout the data the learners appear to use the L1 in times of L2 linguistic breakdown when the communicative pressure of the situation is great and they do not want to interrupt their message by having to solicit translations, as in Example 5.

Example 5. Marissa (NM): Use of L1 When L2 Breakdown Is Experienced

1	¿Estudias mucho? ¿Estudias?	
	'Do you study a lot? Do you study?'	
2		¿Aquí? 'Here?'
3	Uh huh.	
4		Uh um no as mucho 'much' um. . . as I should.
5	(Laughs) Ok. ¿Y dónde vives aquí	
6	en Middlebury?	

'And where do you live here in Middlebury?'

7 En Batel North dormitorio.
'In Batel North dormitory'

8 Um hum, ¿Te gusta Batel?
'Um hum, Do you like Batel?'

9 Uh sí es muy um . . . uh energy
'Uh yes it is very um . . . uh energy'

In Example 5, Marissa uses the L1 in Lines 4 and 9 when she lacks the language structures to communicate her thoughts, but she also chooses not to ask for a translation of the word in Line 9, even though she knows the phrase *Cómo se dice* 'How do you say,' as evidenced later in the interview. This avoidance, too, could be a function of the relationship that has been established with the interviewer. In several previous instances during the interview, Marissa used a word in English with rising intonation to request a translation and the interviewer did not oblige. It could be that, by this point in the interview, Marissa had given up trying to negotiate at times of linguistic breakdown and just used the L1 in these situations.

Another instance in which we find frequent use of the L1 in the data is when the learner is attempting to clarify or repair a previous utterance in the L2. Take the following from Frank (Example 6):

Example 6. Frank (NM): Use of L1 to Clarify or Repair

1 Um hum. Muy bien, muy bien. ¿Y e en South
2 Dakota, hace mucho calor?
'Um hum. Very good, very good. And in South Dakota, is it very hot?'

3 Sí mucho calor. Muy, muy.
'Yes very hot. Very, very.'

4 ¿Sí? ¿Siempre? 'Yes? Always?'

5 Sí uh en . . . v . . . *vierno es . . .
'Yes uh in . . . w . . . winter is...'

6 that's Spring right?

7 En inviermo hace frío, ¿no?
'In winter it's cold, right?'

8 Ok that's what I thought.
9 En invierno es muy frío,
10 muy . . . ' In winter is very cold, very . . .'

11 ¿Pero te gusta South Dakota?
'But do you like South Dakota?'

12 Sí, me gusta South Dakota.
'Yes, I like South Dakota.'

13 I don't know why.
14 (Laughs)
15 But I do.

Frank uses the L1 in Line 6 to verify that he has correctly expressed what he intended to say in Line 5, and again in Line 13 he uses the L1 to clarify and elaborate on his statement in Line 12. This tendency to use the L1 to clarify and elaborate previous utterances in the L2 is common in the data at all three levels of proficiency.

3. Whispering to Self

Yet another use of the L1 in the data serves a very different function. Platt and Brooks (1994) found in their analysis of two beginning learners of English that their subjects frequently whispered comments to themselves in the L1. These comments appeared to be directed principally at the learners themselves and not at the interlocutor. They explain that this whispering to self "serves important mediational purposes for individuals for completing cognitively demanding tasks and for orienting themselves and their interlocutors to the task and to the language that is used to construct the task" (p. 507). We find examples of such behavior in the present data as well (Example 7).

Additionally, there are many examples of the learners whispering to themselves all or part of a statement that the interviewer just directed at them (Example 8).

Example 7. Robin (NH): Whispering to Self in L1

1	¿Qué hacen Uds. uh cuando cuando no	
2	van a Burlington y cuando no estudian,	
3	qué hacen Uds.?	
	'What do you do uh when when you don't go to Burlington and when you don't study, what do you do?'	
4		Um . . . (let's see) vamos a la 'we go to the'
5		Fitness Center?
6	Uh huh ¿y está cerca? 'and is it nearby?'	
7		Sí. 'Yes.'

Example 8. Marissa (NH): Whispered Repetition of Interviewer

1	Uh, ¿y qué trabajo hace tu padre?	
	'Uh, and what work does your father do?'	
2		Real estate.
3	Uh huh, no sabes. 'Uh huh, you don't know.'	
4		(No sabes)
5	No sabes. Um pues mira, um ¿dónde	
6	vives aquí en Middlebury?	
	'You don't know. Um well look, um where do you live here in Middlebury?'	
7		Yo vivo en uh Stuart.
		'I live in uh Stuart.'
8	¿Es una residencia? 'Is it a dormitory?'	

9		Sí. 'Yes'
10	Sí. ¿Y tienes compañera de cuarto? 'Yes. And do you have a roommate?'	
11		(Compañera?)
12	Compañera de cuarto. Otra persona en	
13	el cuarto 'Roommate. Another person in the room'	
14		Oh compañera sí, sí. 'Oh roommate yes, yes'

Examples 7 and 8 appear to be instances in which the learners try to grapple with utterances that were not understood and to access information stored cognitively. The fact that the learners whisper makes it doubtful that they are addressing the interlocutor; thus, these examples should not be considered a request for clarification or a comprehension check, even though the interviewer sometimes responds to it as such.

4. Discourse Strategies

Perdue and Klein (1992), in their study of two beginning learners of English, report that their subjects relied heavily on scaffolding with their interlocutor to express themselves (p. 268). The data gathered in the present study support this finding. The learners at the NL and NM levels rarely give more than a one-clause answer before pausing and waiting for a response from the instructor. At all three levels of proficiency the learners make few attempts to initiate topics. At the NL level the learners never take control of the conversation. Frank does initiate an interaction when he is instructed to ask the interviewer a question, but he is uncomfortable in this role and he quickly throws the responsibility back to the interviewer (Example 9):

Example 9. Frank (NM): Avoiding Topic Initiation

1	¿Tienes tú alguna pregunta para mí? 'Do you have a question for me?'	
2		Uh, ¿un profesor? ¿Tú un profesor? 'Uh, a professor? You a professor?'
3	Aquí en Middlebury no. 'Here at Middlebury, no.'	
4		¿No? 'No?'
5	Estoy tres días aquí con las entrevistas. 'I am here three days with the interviews.'	
6		No ah otra preguntas. 'No ah another questions.'

At the NH level there are examples of several hesitant attempts to take control of the interaction, especially in the role-play situation.

The success of these exchanges, however, is still dependent on help from the interlocutor to supply key vocabulary words, as in Example 10 from Vince.

Further evidence for the importance of scaffolding is found in the frequent occurrence of several interactional features identified by Ellis (1985). The features that are most common in the current data include clarification requests, comprehension checks, repetitions, and expansions. The learners rely on these features to build vertical constructions that enable an exchange of meaning.

Example 10. Vince (NH): Interlocutor to Supply Key Vocabulary

1	¿Y cúal es tu trabajo? 'And what is your work?'	
2		Ah yo trabajo con la compan
3		compania de telefono AT&T. 'Ah I work with the telephone compan company AT&T.'
4	Ah sí? 'Oh yeah?'	
5		Sí, uh tenemos muchos um . . . um . . .
6		¿cómo se dice customers? 'Yes, uh we have many um . . . how do you say customers?'
7	Clientes. 'Customers'	
8		Ah, ok. Tenemos muchos *quientes . . . 'Ah, ok. We have many (mispronounces)'
9	Clientes. 'Customers'	
10		Clientes que hablan español. 'Customers who speak Spanish.'

A clarification request occurs when the learner does not understand part of the interlocutor's utterance and solicits help. The learners in the data used a wide variety of phrases to request clarification, including *no entiendo* 'I don't understand,' *¿perdón?* 'pardon?' *repita* 'repeat,' *¿cómo?* 'what?' and *¿qué?* 'what?' An even more common technique, however, was the repetition of the misunderstood part of the utterance with rising intonation, as in Example 11, where Frank has just responded to the question, "Where are you from?":

Example 11. Frank (NM): Clarification Requests

1	¿En South Dakota? Ah muy lejos. 'In South Dakota? Oh very far.'	
2		¿Muy lejos? Ah . . . ¿qué lejos? 'Very far? Ah . . . what far?'
3	Muchas millas. 'Many miles.'	
4		¿Muchas millas? No, no um . . . .

'Many miles? No, no um . . . .'

5 ¿Y tienes familia en South Dakota?
'And do you have family in South Dakota?'

In this example, Frank indicates in Line 2 that he does not understand the word *lejos* and he asks for clarification. The interviewer responds with circumlocution, but in Line 4 we see that understanding is still not achieved, because Frank again repeats the interviewer's words with rising intonation. So in Line 5, the interviewer switches the topic.

We find additional examples of repetition of part of the interviewer's utterance with rising intonation from Frank later in the interview (Example 12):

Example 12. Frank (NM): Comprehension Checks

1	Ah ha. Um, ¿Cuándo cuándo	
2	empiezan las clases?	
	'Ah ha. Um, When do classes begin?'	
3		¿Cuándo empiezan? 'When do they begin?'
4	Sí 'Yes'	
5		Uh mi clases uh um es . . . a la ocho
		'Uh my classes uh um is . . . at eight'
6	¿A las ocho? 'At eight?'	
7		Uh to um son las uno. 'Uh to um it is one.'
8	¿La una? 'One?'	
9		La una 'One'
10	Um hum. ¿Todos los días?	
	'Un hum. Every day?'	
11		¿Todos los días? Sí uh all cinco días.
		'Every day? Yes uh all five days.'
12	¿Qué días tienes clase?	
	'What days do you have class?'	
13		¿Qué días? Uh lunes, martes, miercoles, jueves,
14		viernes. 'What days? Uh Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.'

In Example 12, however, the repetition with rising intonation serves a different purpose. Here we have instances of comprehension checks. In Lines 3, 6, 8, 11, and 13, the speaker wants to ensure that he has correctly understood the interviewer's meaning; thus, he repeats all or part of the previous utterance in an attempt to confirm what he has heard.

Repetition is an interactional device that serves several purposes in the data. In addition to the examples of repetition described above, there are also frequent examples of other repetitions where the speaker repeats all or part of the interlocu-

tor's previous utterance without the rising intonation that would signal a comprehension check or a clarification request and thus require a response from the interlocutor. In Line 8 of Example 13 we find an occurrence of this feature on the part of the interviewer:

Example 13. Leslie (NL): Self-Repetition

1	Uh huh, ¿Y tienes una compañera de	
2	cuarto? Una amiga que vive contigo?	
	'Uh huh, And do you have a roommate?	
	A friend that lives with you?'	
3		Sí. 'Yes.'
4	¿Y cómo se llama? 'And what is her name?'	
5		Leslie.
6	No tú te llamas Leslie, ¿pero tu amiga?	
	'No your name is Leslie, but your friend?'	
7		Oh, Amanda.
8	Amanda. ¿Y cómo es Amanda? Quiero	
9	información sobre Amanda.	
	'Amanda. And what is Amanda like? I want	
	information about Amanda.'	

Also evident in Example 13 is the use of self-repetition. We find many instances of self-repetition in the data where the interviewer repeats or rephrases all or part of the previous utterance, as in Lines 1 and 2, and Lines 8 and 9 above.

A fourth interactional device prevalent throughout the data is expansion. This device appears when the learner rephrases the interlocutor's previous utterance and adds grammatical and/or semantic information, thus creating a *more complete* and complex thought. Observe Example 14.

Example 14. Frank (NM): Expansion

1	¿Tienes hermanos? 'Do you have siblings?'	
2		Sí un hermano uh es Benjamin uh
3		en Germany. 'Yes one brother uh he is Benjamin uh in Germany.'
4	Oh, está en Alemania. ¿Y cuántos años	
5	tiene Benjamin?	
	'Oh, he is in Germany. And how old is Benjamin?'	

Here the interviewer uses the information provided by the learner in Line 3 to form a complete and grammatically accurate sentence in Line 4. Again, the restatement of the information provided in Line 3 cannot be understood as a confirmation check because there is no rising intonation. Hatch (1978) also argues that such examples should not be considered repairs, because the rules of polite conversation would allow for a repair only if the learner had solicited one by using rising intonation in the difficult part of his utterance, as in Example 15. There we see that in Line 2 Vince is unsure of the word *bilote* so he solicits a repair with the use of rising intonation. When the difficulty is still unresolved, he tries again to get help by repeating the problematic word, and

Example 15. Vince (NH): Learner Solicits a Repair

1		Te gusta um la biblio uh bi um
2		*bilote? Um um. . . biblio. . .
		'Do you like um the libra uh li um
		(invents word)? Um um . . . libra . . . '
3	¿Biblioteca? 'Library?'	
4		No, no biblioteca. (Laughs) Uh um
5		*bilota? Um bicycle?
		'No, not library. (Laughs) Uh um
		(invents word)? Um bicycle?'
6	Bicicleta. 'Bicycle.'	
7	Sí. 'Yes.'	Bicicleta, bicicleta. Sí, sí,sí, sí.
		'Bicycle, Bicycle. Yes, yes, yes, yes.'
8	Para mi la bicicleta es transporte,	
9	no es uh diversión.	
	'For me the bicycle is transportation, not diversion.'	

finally gives up and uses the word in English. Hatch proposes that the type of expansion found in the previous example from Frank, therefore, is not a repair, but rather serves to reassure the learner that he has been understood (p. 427).

Ellis (1985) found that the patterns of occurrence of several interactional features vary at different levels of proficiency and that this variance is often the result of the speaker's attempts to achieve comprehensible input. As he explains, "Because comprehensible input is a negotiated rather than an absolute phenomenon, dependent on the learner's developing communicative proficiency. . . different features may aid development at different times" (p. 82). The data in the present study support this finding. Tables 3 and 4 show the occurrence of interactional features at each level of proficiency and for each learner. Table 3 shows that self-repetitions and other repetitions are common across all three levels of proficiency, but, as in the Ellis study, self-repetitions decrease as proficiency increases. At the

Table 3
Interactional Features by Proficiency Level

Interactional Feature	NL	NM	NH
Clarification requests	0	10	6
Comprehension Checks	0	9	6
Self-repetitions	16	8	8
Other repetitions	5	7	5
Expansions	6	2	5

Table 4
Use of Interactional Features by Learner

Learner & Level	Clar. Requests	Comp. Checks	Self-repetition	Other repetition	Expansion
Leslie - NL	0	0	10	2	3
Chin - NL	0	0	6	3	3
Frank - NM	4	7	3	5	2
Marissa - NM	6	2	5	2	0
Vince - NH	5	5	4	2	3
Robin - NH	1	1	4	3	2

NL level there are a total of sixteen self-repetitions, while at the NH level there are only eight. Unlike the Ellis study, the current data show no significant change in the number of expansions from the NL to the NH level, but the increase noted by Ellis in comprehension checks as proficiency increases is found in the current data as well. Comprehension checks, however, were most common at the NM level, with a total occurrence of nine for the two NM learners, while at the NH level there was a total of six. The occurrence of clarification requests similarly was greatest at the NM level, with a total of ten occurrences versus six occurrences at the NH level. In the present data there were no instances of clarification requests or comprehension checks at the NL level.

Due to the limited scope of both the present and the Ellis studies, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the relationship between proficiency and the frequency of occurrence of these interactional features. Ellis cautions that the interactional styles of the participants will probably be equally if not more influential than the proficiency levels in determining use of these features (p. 76). Thus, at the NH level, for example, five clarification requests and five comprehension checks were used in Vince's interview, while only one instance of each feature was found in the data from Robin.

What is confirmed in the Ellis study, however, is the role these interactional features play in second language acquisition. In a seminal article discussing the role of discourse analysis in second language research, Hatch (1978) questioned the well entrenched position that the ability to converse was a direct result of having acquired a sufficient amount of language. She proposed conversely that language acquisition grew out of conversation (pp. 406-7). She explains, citing Scollon, that interactions called "vertical structures" form the basis for syntactic constructions that Scollon calls "horizontal structures" later on. We find an example in the current data from Chin (Example 16):

Example 16. Chin (NL): Vertical Structures That Lead to Horizontal Structures

1	¿Cómo se llama tu profesor de matemáticas? 'What is your math professor's name?'	
2		Um Peterson.
3	Uh huh. ¿Es hombre o es mujer? ¿Hombre o mujer? 'Uh huh. Is that a man or a woman? Man or woman?'	
4		Hombre. 'Man.'
5	Uh huh. Es señor Peterson. 'Uh huh. He is Mr. Peterson.'	
6		Señor Peterson. 'Mr. Peterson.'
7	Uh huh. ¿Y tu profesor um . . . tu profesor de español,	
8	es señor o señora? 'Uh huh. And your professor um. . . your Spanish professor is Mr. or Mrs.?'	
9		Señor um Gustavo Mía 'Mr. um Gustavo Mía'
10	Mejilla	
11		Mejilla
12	Uh huh	
13		Señor Mejilla 'Mr. Mejilla'

Here we find the interviewer uses expansion and repetition to provide the building blocks with which Chin is able to produce a proper title in Spanish in Line 13.

5. Negotiation

Pica (1987) also suggests that negotiated interactions are crucial to help the learner reach higher levels of proficiency. As she explains,

> What enables learners to move beyond their current interlanguage receptive and expressive capacities when they need to understand unfamiliar linguistic input or when required to produce a comprehensible message are opportunities to modify and restructure their interaction with their interlocutor until mutual comprehension is reached. (p. 8)

Pica (1994) points out, however, that this type of negotiation does not appear to help the learners develop accuracy. A particularly striking example to support this conclusion can be found in data from a previous study by Bearden (1997) (see Example 17).

Example 17. Learner #1: Failure to Improve Accuracy

1		Tengo un esposo. ' I have a husband.'
2	¿Tú tienes esposo? 'You have a husband?'	
3		No, ella tenga. . . 'No, she have . . .'
4	Tiene 'Has'	
5		tiene un esposo . . . uh se llamo Rick
6		y tengo un . . . uh . . . niño. 'has a husband . . . uh his name is Rick and I have a . . . uh . . . boy.'
7	Um hum...¿tú tienes? 'you have?'	
8		No ella . . . ella tienes un niño. 'No she . . . she have a boy.'
9	Uh huh	
10		Se llama . . . uh . . . Nick . . . uh . . . tengo dos
11		años. 'His name is . . . uh . . . Nick . . . uh . . . I am two years old.'
12	No, ¿tú tienes dos años? 'No, you are two years old?'	
13		*Ello tienes '(invents pronoun) have'
14	Él 'He'	
15		Él ten . . . tengo ' He ha . . . I have'
16	Tiene 'Has'	
17		Tiene dos años ' He has two years = He is two years old'
18	Ok	
19		Um . . . soy . . . ella mi hermana soy
20		muy simpático. 'Um . . . I am . . . she my sister I am very nice.'
21	Ok	

In Line 1 the learner intends to refer to his sister, but states *Tengo un esposo* 'I have a husband.' The instructor initiates a repair in Line 2

that prompts the learner to attempt to correct his statement in Line 3. His new statement is still incorrect with regard to mood, but is now inflected properly for person. In Line 4, the instructor supplies the correct form that the learner repeats in Line 5, but later in the same utterance, he reverts back to the incorrect form of the verb he originally used in Line 1. The whole process is repeated two more times in Lines 7 through 17. This example makes a clear case for the learner's inability to process the form of his utterance or the corrections that the instructor is making while under the immediate pressure of trying to communicate specific information.

A study by Gass and Varonis (1994), however, suggests that these negotiated interactions may improve accuracy in subsequent conversations by focusing the learners' attention on the problematic part of the utterance and thus enabling them to correct the problem. The authors state,

> What we claim is that interactional input provides a forum for learners to readily detect a discrepancy between their learner language and the target language and that the awareness of the mismatch serves the function of triggering a modification of existing second language knowledge, the results of which may show up at some later point in time. (p. 299)

Another explanation for the lack of improvement with regard to accuracy may be that grammar is rarely the topic of negotiation in a natural conversational setting. In fact, the OPI Training Manual (Buck, 1989) specifically prohibits interviewers from correcting grammar during the interview. There are no instances of negotiation concerning accuracy in the data from the present study. Hatch (1978) argues that the biggest challenge facing adult learners of a second language is identifying the topic and that topic nomination, rather than grammatical accuracy, is the purpose of most negotiation involving language learners. She explains that, with children, there is a greatly reduced set of topics the learner can be expected to comment on, usually concrete things or on-going actions, so the topics of conversation are naturally limited. With adults, however, there is a much greater variety of possible topics and time references, which makes topic identification a major difficulty. Hatch explains, "Since the topics in adult discourse are much more varied and more abstract, it is much more difficult for the adult to identify conversation topics unless he knows the necessary vocabulary for that topic" (p. 431). According to Hatch, the purpose of negotiation at the beginning levels is soliciting and clarifying vocabulary purely in an attempt to establish the topic.

There is ample evidence to support this position in the current data. At the NL, where self-repetition is the greatest, we find that the interviewer uses the technique of stating and then immediately paraphrasing a question as a means of providing a wide range of vocabulary clues to signal the topic. A good example is found in the data from Leslie (Example 18):

Example 18 Leslie (NL): Interviewer States and Paraphrases

1	Um, ¿dónde vives aquí en Middlebury?	
2	¿En qué residencia vives?	
	'Um, where do you live here in Middlebury?	
	In what dormitory do you live?'	
3		(Silence)
4	¿Vives en en Painter o en Star?	
	'Do you live in Painter or in Star?'	
5		Oh, um Stuart?
6	En Stuart uh huh. Y tu cuarto,	
7	¿es bueno o es malo?	
	'In Stuart uh huh. And your room,	
	is it good or is it bad?'	
8		Bueno. 'Good.'
9	Uh huh, ¿Y tienes una compañera de	
10	cuarto? Una amiga que vive contigo?	
	'Uh huh, And do you have a roommate?	
	A friend that lives with you?'	
11		Sí. 'Yes.'

The interviewer asks Leslie a question in Line 1 and immediately paraphrases in Line 2. When Leslie does not respond, the interviewer gives more vocabulary clues by naming several possible dorms in which the learner might live. The learner is thus able to make the necessary associations and answer the question. Again, in Lines 9 and 10 we find another instance of self-repetition. This technique of self-repetition by the interviewer is used 10 out of 18 times when a new topic is introduced in the interview with Leslie.

As already noted, as proficiency increases, self-repetitions decrease, but even at the higher levels negotiation still seems to deal primarily with vocabulary. Thus, at the NM and NH levels, the comprehension checks and clarification requests are principally concerned with specific words, as we see in the following example (Example 19):

Example 19. Marissa (NM): Negotiation of Vocabulary

1	Sí. ¿Cómo es tu cuarto? ¿Qué tienes en	
2	tu cuarto?	
	'Yes. What is your room like? What do	
	you have in your room?'	
3		¿Perdón? 'Pardon?'
4	¿En tu cuarto, en tu habitación?	
	'In your room, in your room?'	
5		Um hum.

6 ¿Cómo es? 'What is it like?'
7 Uh es pequeño. 'Uh it's small.'
8 Ah ha.

In Line 3 Marissa asks for clarification of the interviewer's question. We cannot know for certain what part of the utterance Marissa did not understand, but the interviewer appears to assume that it was the vocabulary word for "room," since the interviewer repeats and then supplies a synonym for this word. Thus, Marissa's clarification request enabled her to get the important content word "room," which consequently allows her to correctly identify the topic.

Hatch summarizes as follows:

> It is tempting . . . to hypothesize that the adult focus in second language learning is on vocabulary . . . but, instead, it appears that the learner is only asking for enough vocabulary to allow him to nominate topics and participate in conversational discourse. Perhaps once the pressure of needing a particular word in order to take his turn in the conversation is gone, the vocabulary is also "forgotten." (p. 430)

The interview with Vince gives a striking example to support Hatch's suggestion that vocabulary is only retained long enough to establish the topic (Example 20):

Example 20. Vince (NH): Learner Does Not Retain Negotiated Vocabulary

1 Sí, y el niño, ¿le gusta leer, le gustan
2 los deportes? 'Yes, and the boy, does
he like to read, does he like sports?'
3 Sí uh tiene un uh . . . uh uh bi
4 *bilote? *Bilota?
'Yes uh he has a uh . . . uh uh (invents words)'
5 ¿Una pelota? ¿De béisbol?
'A ball? For baseball?'
6 Sí, sí. 'Yes, yes.'
7 Sí, sí sí sí. Sí. 'Yes, yes,yes,yes. Yes.'
8 Um . . . y um . . . cuántos uh . . . no um
9 qué es la uh *pricio? 'Um . . . and um . . . how
many uh..no um what is the uh price?'
10 Ah, bueno, tenemos perdón, de dos
11 precios; tenemos una pelota grande
12 que se usa para el softbol....
'Oh well, we have pardon two prices; we
have a large ball that is used for softball'
13 Sí, sí 'Yes, yes'
14 que cuesta ocho dólares y tenemos una
15 pelota más pequeña para el béisbol que
16 cuesta diez.
'that costs eight dollars and we have a

	smaller ball for baseball that costs ten.'	
17		Ah...uh muy bien. Uh yo *quiera um uh
18		*pilote uh diez dólares pero puede . . . puede . . .
19		um puede . . . tiene un uh *caje para um uh el
20		*pilote?
		'Ah . . . uh very good. Uh I want um uh
		(invents word) uh ten dollars but can
		you . . . can you . . . um can you . . . do you have a
		uh box for um uh the (invents word)?'
21	Sí, sí sí sí. 'Yes, yes yes yes.'	

In Lines 3 and 4 Vince makes several attempts at producing the correct word for "ball" and requests a repair using rising intonation. The interviewer responds by supplying the correct form of the word that enables the conversation to continue, but as we see in Lines 18 and 20, Vince has modified his initial attempt at the word by adopting the correct initial consonant. He still does not use the correct word, however. An interesting parallel to this example comes later in the same interview when he is asking the interviewer a question (Example 21):

Example 21. Vince (NH): Use of Invented Word to Solicit Key Vocabulary

1		Te gusta um la biblio uh bi um
2		* bilote? Um um . . . biblio. . .l
		'Do you like um the libra uh li um
		(invents word)? Um um . . . libra . . .'
3	¿Biblioteca? 'Library?'	
4		No, no biblioteca. (Laughs) Uh um
5		*bilota? Um bicycle?
		'No, not library. (Laughs) Uh um
		(invents word)? Um bicycle?'
6	Bicicleta. 'Bicycle.'	
7	Sí. 'Yes.'	Bicicleta, bicicleta. Sí, sí,sí, sí.
		'Bicycle, Bicycle. Yes, yes, yes, yes.'

We find in this example that Vince uses the same word in an attempt to express "bicycle" as he used in Example 20 when he was attempting to express "ball." This usage is noteworthy because "bicycle" in English and Spanish are cognates, but instead of trying a cognate, which is often a natural reaction when negotiating for vocabulary between the two languages, Vince uses the word *bilote*. Except for the initial consonant, this word bears no resemblance to *bicicleta*. Thus, it seems, at least in these two examples, that Vince employs the word *bilote* on occasions when he is unsure of the correct vocabulary word in an attempt to solicit the proper word from his interlocutor, a tactic that was successful in both of the previous examples.

Hatch underscores the importance of negotiation for topic identification, stating, "Once the topic is recognized, [the learner] can further use his knowledge of the world and of discourse in his own language to predict the possible questions, the concerns which might be expressed in questions about that topic" (p. 423). Thus, without the ability to successfully identify the topic through negotiation, no conversation can take place. We find many instances where this happens in the data from all three levels of proficiency. At the NL level the learner frequently opts out of the conversation by remaining silent. We see this strategy in an example from Leslie (Example 22).

In Line 5, Leslie's silence causes the interlocutor to abandon the topic and to pose a new question. In Line 9, however, Leslie's silence does not impede the conversation to the same degree, because she has a sympathetic interlocutor who continues the process of negotiation even when Leslie tries to opt out.

Example 22. Leslie (NL): Learner Remains Silent

1	En comparación. Ah ha, ¿y um te gusta	
2	Middlebury? ¿Estás contenta en Middlebury?	
	'In comparison. Ah ha, and do you like	
	Middlebury? Are you content at Middlebury?	
3		Sí. 'Yes'
4	¿Y por qué te gusta? 'And why do you like it?'	
5		(Silence)
6	Um, ¿cómo son las clases para ti?	
	'Um, how are the classes for you?'	
7		Muy bien? 'Very good?'
8	Um hum. ¿Y qué clases tienes?	
	'Um hum. And what classes do you have?	
9		(Silence)
10	Español 'Spanish'	
11		Um, geography

At the higher levels of proficiency, however, it is often the interviewer who does not participate in the negotiation, thus bringing the topic to an abrupt end as in Example 23:

Example 23. Marissa (NM): Interviewer Does Not Negotiate

1	¿Qué, dime qué llevas. ¿Qué ropa llevas?
2	¿Qué es esto?
	'What, tell me what you are wearing. What clothes are you wearing? What is this?'

3		Uh blue jeans, uh camisas 'Uh blue jeans, uh shirts'
4	Um hum. ¿Y eso? 'And that?'	
5		Um . . . sneakers
6	Pero esos no son sneakers. 'But those aren't sneakers.'	
7		Um pero como se dice uh
8		shoes? 'Um but how do you say shoes?'
9	Ok, sabes los colores, ¿Qué color es éste? 'Ok, you know the colors, What color is this?'	
10		Sue, suete 'Swea, sweate'
11	Um hum, ¿y el color? 'And the color?'	
12		Sí . . . uh es éste? 'Yes . . . uh is it this?'
13	Uh huh	
14		Es . . . rojo? 'It is . . . red?'

In Lines 7 and 8 Marissa attempts to negotiate for the word "shoe," which she does not know, and thus tries to keep the conversation going. The interviewer does not respond to her request, however, and instead changes the topic in Line 9. The learner, who is expecting a response to her request, is unprepared for the topic change and, in Line 10, she continues to respond to the interviewer's original topic of identifying the items of clothing.

6. Interviewer's Role

Examples such as the previous raise the question of the interviewer's role in negotiation during the interview. The OPI Training Manual (Buck, 1989) states that the OPI is "intended to replicate natural conversational behavior" (p. 5-15) and instructs interviewers to "perform negotiative moves when communication is not totally successful" (p. 5-2). These two stipulations would obligate the interviewer in Example 23 to respond to the learner's request for an unknown vocabulary word. Yet the manual also instructs interviewers not to furnish vocabulary and to assume the role of a monolingual speaker of the target language during the interview. These directions would prohibit the interviewer from responding to the learner's request in the above example. Thus, the interviewers find themselves in a somewhat contradictory position, which partially explains the wide variety of responses to this situation found in the data. There is variation even within the same interview as to how the interviewer responds when confronted with this type of request, and across the data it is obvious that certain interviewers are much more willing to supply the vocabulary that is being solicited. It is noteworthy that the interviews in which such requests are fulfilled resulted in much more authentic conversation and much smoother topic transitions, as can be seen in Example 24:

Example 24. Vince (NH): Interviewer Provides Requested Vocabulary

1	Uh, ¿Es es por eso que estudias	
2	español?	
	'Uh, Is is that why you study Spanish?	
3		Um, sí, sí. Uh en en Florida es um
4		uh . . . ¿cómo se dice mandatory?
		'Um, yes,yes. Uh in in Florida it is um uh . . . how do you say mandatory?'
5	Necesario. 'Necessary.'	
6		Oh, es necesario tener dos años de
7		español. 'Oh, it is necessary to have two years of Spanish.'
8	¿Ah sí? 'Oh yeah?'	
9		Sí, sí. Muy importante porque uh en
10		Jacksonville uh ellos no hablan español uh
11		muchas pero uh um va a sur de Jacksonville, uh
12		en Orlando, Miami habla español muy bie..uh
13		muchas.
		'Yes, yes. Very important because uh in Jacksonville uh they don't speak Spanish uh many but uh um go to south of Jacksonville, uh in Orlando, Miami speak Spanish very we . . . uh many.'
14	Um hum. Sí, sí. Bueno eso es interesante.	
	'Um hum. Yes, yes. Well that is interesting.'	

We see in this example that the interviewer's response to Vince's request for the word "mandatory" in Line 4 enables him to continue the conversation and express, although somewhat awkwardly, a long and complex utterance in Lines 9 through 13. On the contrary, if the interviewer had denied Vince's request and switched the topic as in Example 23, the conversation would have come to a halt and Vince would not have had the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge he does in Example 24.

It seems, therefore, that if the intention of the OPI is to replicate genuine conversation as nearly as possible, interviewers are obliged by rules of polite conversation to respond to such requests. In the OPI setting, the learners are aware that the interviewer speaks both the target language and the L1. Thus, as the pressure to communicate increases, the learners can be expected to take recourse to any and all tools at their disposal to keep the conversation moving, and they will expect the interviewer to do the same. Any reluctance on the part of the interviewer to cooperate in achieving mutual understanding will be seen as a violation of the rules of interaction and will thus detract from the sense of the interview as a genuine conversational exchange. Byrnes (1987) argues that this cooperation is crucial if the

interview is to be an accurate measure of the learner's pragmatic competence. As she explains,

> With a keen awareness on the part of the tester of what constitutes natural conversational behavior, including natural listening behavior, curbing it only in so far as it would preclude an optimal and efficient sampling of speech on the part of the candidate, I have observed over and over again how the dynamics of message transmission become so powerful in themselves that the candidate can present an amazingly multi-faceted performance, even at the lower level of language use. . . . Conversely, when the tester does not bring to the task that level of interpersonal involvement and willingness to become a true conversational partner within the constraints of the event, then little of the kinds of evidence for pragmatic competence I have mentioned can surface. (pp. 174-75)

Furthermore, even in instances in which the learner is truly interacting with a monolingual speaker of the target language, offering key vocabulary in the L1 if the learner does not know the necessary word in the target language is a valid strategy that can often lead to a successful interaction if the interlocutor can understand the word from the context or recognize it as a cognate.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined several aspects of Novice-Level discourse in an attempt to describe some of the distinguishing patterns and to gain a better understanding of the language being produced by the majority of students in foreign language classrooms today. A look at the cohesive devices used by these learners shows that, despite limited linguistic resources, Novice-Level speakers do attempt to produce cohesive discourse, and, as proficiency increases, so does the use of cohesive devices. At the NL level, for example, referential cohesive devices were not used at all, while at the NH level there were 32 instances of pronoun usage. The data also showed that learners did not readily transfer their L1 rules regarding pronoun usage, but, from an early stage, they were able to exploit the pro-drop aspect of Spanish to create cohesive discourse through topic continuity. The NM level was characterized by the greatest use of pro-drop. This characteristic is seen perhaps because, at the NH level, learners are beginning to construct and implement their L2 syntactic systems and are more likely to supply pronouns for clarification, or because they are using less imitative or memorized speech, and they fall back on L1 rules to help them construct original utterances in the L2.

The data also show that, as proficiency increases, learners achieve greater cohesion in their discourse by attempting to use more conjunctions and other lexical items such as *también* 'also.' Again, the use of these devices was most evident at the NH level because learners at the lower levels of proficiency rarely produced utterances of sufficient complexity to include conjunctions or other lexical devices. Even at the NH level, however, the discourse was often redundant because beginning learners have limited linguistic

tools at their disposal to create cohesion. Well-timed instructional emphasis at the NH level on a wider variety of features that learners might incorporate into their oral production could be effective in helping learners achieve greater cohesion in their discourse.

Scaffolding and negotiation were found to be two important aspects of Novice-Level discourse. Only at the NM and NH levels did the learners make any attempts to initiate the topic or take control of the dialogue, and on the few occasions when this did occur, the learners were hesitant and uncomfortable in this role. It would be valuable to implement tasks in the foreign language classroom that would force learners to direct the conversation so that they could gain practice in this important discourse skill as well.

The four interactional features that were examined in the study were clarification requests, comprehension checks, repetition, and expansions. The data support Ellis' finding that the occurrence of these features varies with level of proficiency. Thus, self-repetitions decreased as proficiency increased, while clarification requests and comprehension checks increased with proficiency. The data show that the use of these features at the Novice level is crucial to building the vertical constructions that allow for exchanges of meaning. Consequently, negotiation at the Novice level is principally concerned not with issues of grammar, but rather with the vocabulary necessary to establish the topic.

There are times in the data, however, where negotiation fails to occur. Often this happens because the learner uses the L1 or opts out of the conversation by remaining silent. Classroom discussion concerning the importance of negotiation and explicit instruction in various negotiation techniques could help learners become more adept at managing situations in which they encounter L2 breakdown and improve their chances for successful communication. The interviewer's willingness to direct the dialogue and help out when problems arise was also found to be crucial to successful interaction. When the interviewer is not willing to cooperate in the negotiation, the possibility of creating genuine conversation is limited, and the learners are less able to demonstrate their full potential in the target language.

From these findings, it is now possible to revise the Novice-Level ACTFL proficiency guidelines to include discourse features. I would propose that the following descriptions be added to the ACTFL guidelines:

Proposed Additions to ACTFL Novice Oral Guidelines

Novice-Low: Learner does not attempt to initiate topic or control conversation and frequently opts out of conversation by remaining silent. Discourse rarely includes cohesive devices. Interaction at this level is characterized by much

self-repetition and repetition of the other and the rare use of clarification requests or comprehension checks. The L1 is used frequently to repair and elaborate and in times of L2 breakdown.

Novice-Mid: Learner makes occasional hesitant attempts to initiate topic. Negotiation is primarily concerned with vocabulary. Clarification requests and comprehension checks are common. Few referential and conjunctional cohesive devices are used, but learner demonstrates a good understanding of pro-drop.

Novice-High: Learner makes more attempts to control dialogue and nominate topic, but negotiation for key vocabulary is critical for success. Interaction is characterized by fewer repetitions and many clarification requests and comprehension checks. Referential, conjunctional, and a few lexical cohesive devices are used more frequently, but the learner's repertoire is limited. Pronouns are frequently included.

This study has focused primarily on discourse aspects of Novice-Level oral production. While descriptions of these discourse features are an important first step, there is still a need for additional studies that examine other aspects of Novice-Level speech, such as grammar, phonology, and syntax. Such studies are crucial if we are to develop level-appropriate testing and teaching techniques. This endeavor should be a priority in the research on oral proficiency so that we can better serve the needs and abilities of all foreign language learners.

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